

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH YOUR BROTHER?

The Lord's Warning against Spiteful Rage (Matt.5:22)

by Domenic Marbaniang

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "You fool!" shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:22)

Jesus points at three ways in which false faith in relation to our fellowmen can bring us in danger of God's judgment. Matthew 5:22 illustrates these.

1. Irrational Infuriation. Jesus said that anyone who was angry at his brother without reason¹ was in danger of judgment. There are two forms of anger in the Bible. One is rational while the other is irrational. The irrational form of anger comes from carnal-mindedness and a faulty perception. Rational anger, on the other hand, is just and expected. The difference between the two is simple. The former is purely a passion while the latter is primarily a judgment (i.e. moral reaction against sin). The former being carnal possesses wicked attributes like intemperance, irritability, envy, jealousy, rage, aggression, barbarity, and hatred. To put it the other way, it lacks the love of the Spirit and proceeds from selfish intention. Rational anger, on the other hand, is not based on isolated and self-centered miscalculations; it proceeds from love. It is important to understand that since love is the fulfilling of the law, even anger cannot be said to be lawful unless it conforms to

¹ The word *eike* translated as "without a cause" is not found in latest texts.

the love of God. The same applies to every other passion. We understand that anger when originating in love will never mean harm to anyone. On the other hand, infuriated anger that has puffed itself up against the individuality and person of someone else is sin.

Short-temperedness and hot-temperedness are not spiritual characteristics; they are self-centered ones. Therefore, the Bible warns against association with quick-tempered ones (Prov. 22: 24). The Bible never tells us to try to adjust with such personality types as if anything labeled as “personality type” must be acceptable; on the other hand, it advises us to stay away from them (see Prov. 21:19; 29:22), not because we do not love them but because their gravitation towards fleshly passion can suck us into their destructive whirlpool. The destructiveness of such disposition intensifies when anger is harbored in hatred and nurtured overtime. Silent anger is only pent up explosives. Any form of anger, therefore, that doesn’t conform to God’s righteousness is sin. Every “personality type” needs to be born again and learn to be Christ-natured. We need to forsake the habit of getting angry over things that are personally annoying. The righteousness of Jesus’ anger is revealed in the fact that He never got angry over things that personally hurt Him but was passionate with regard to righteousness and holiness. His anger was never a passion-driven reaction but a righteous disposition against falsehood, hypocrisy, and crime. There is nothing like a neutral anger. Anger is either rational or irrational

Irrational anger is miscalculation of oneself in relation to God and His world. This means that it is not a mere impulse but an impulse prompted by a noetic condition of misjudgment. In other words, anger that is irrational is so because it is based on false, unreal, and unfounded reasons. Often, a person adamant in his irrational anger attempts to justify it by gathering false reasons around it. The absurdity of this is acute when the angry man starts

believing such reasons and aggravates in his false disposition. It is all a miscalculation and a faulty location or placement of faith.

Rational anger, on the other hand, proceeds from the righteousness and love of God. It sees things the way God sees them, with the eyes of truth and true faith. It is neither clouded in sight by ego-mania nor ruled in feelings by carnal promptings. Therefore, it never violates the love of God. When the Scripture tells us to be angry but not sin (Eph. 4:26), it doesn't mean to say that we can be angry as long as we do not sin, as if anger can be isolated from disposition and faith. It means to say that we must avoid any form of anger that is flesh-induced; such anger finds no respite till the lust is fulfilled. It intensifies in hatred and choler and can cause injury to self and surrounding. Rational anger, on the other hand, conforms to God's principles of thought and action and is not fickle as the badly informed, lustfully-prompted, and illogically plotted anger.

Ephesians 4:26 can be better translated as saying "Do not be angry and sin," which is a command against sinfully-disposed and fallaciously grounded anger. Such anger should neither be suppressed nor repressed (far be its being expressed); it must be divested of its ire by the power of God's Word and the love of the Spirit. One gets angry with something in heart and mind. How one is disposed towards one's fellowmen and what one believes about them is therefore important. Anger, as stated earlier, is not isolated and neutral. It is always associated with some kind of belief and disposition. Hastiness in condemning someone and hatred are examples of sinful anger in the same manner as false accusation and murder are sinful. Anger that is prolonged and seeking sinful satiation invites judgment and can never be justified. It also can never submit to the righteous Law of God since it is carnally-inclined. Therefore, the Scripture says that the wrath of man (or carnal anger) doesn't act out the righteousness of God (Jas. 1:20).

Though we have spoken of infuriation here, any form of emotion against our fellowmen that doesn't flow from divine love

is irrational and dangerous. Therefore, Christians must guard their heart against all such evils of false faith and disposition.

2. Downright Devaluation. Jesus said that to call someone Raca (or a worthless and useless person) is to be in danger of the Sanhedrin. Of course, an abusive person is sooner or later dragged to the court. But even if he may escape it, he can't escape the Tribunal where God is Judge. Jesus said that we will be judged for every idle word that we speak (Matt. 12:36). Words are idle when they are segregated from truth and proper intention; proper intention, because truth cannot be separated from the end to which it leads the believer and the believer must conform to truth's proper intention in order to be true. Therefore, what we speak and with what spirit we speak something is important. To call someone Raca means to label him as worthless and useless, a labeling which man is not authorized to make; for it is God who creates man for His own purposes and it He who judges man. It is devaluation of someone's value in one's own sight. This devaluation is not just disparaging but also a confession of something that is not validated by God. Secondly, it evinces a derogatory disposition towards the other that is also expressive of self-pride. A man of faith in God will never call another person as essentially worthless because He believes in God and the perfection of his creation. Man is not born worthless in nature; it is his actions that determine the worth or worthlessness of the kind of life he is living.

The human way of considering worth is with respect to self-profit. Relationships are valued with respect to whether they are profitable to them in some way or the other. Carnal Christians boast of higher links and connections with VIPs and desire to be like them and be seen around with them. The pharisaic attitude seeks human recognition for its religiosity and spirituality. This reveals that their value systems are not according to the righteousness of God. Therefore, Jesus said that what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Lk. 16:15). It is when we treat individuals with respect to their value

before God and heaven that we really begin to relate properly in our faith to God. Faith separated from love has no value since it is love that gives value to faith. Therefore, the Word says that “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1Cor. 13:2, ASV). The verses following the above statement give a description of what true love is. One can clearly see the unselfish and unfading nature of love here. It is important for us to understand that God doesn’t so much appreciate the office of the priest or the family background of the Levite as much as he values the kindness and love of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:33). The Good Samaritan need not relate to him. He could have argued that the Jews deserved such fate for treating Samaritans as outcasts. He could also have argued that spending time and money of such a stranger was wastage of time, money, and energy since he was not going to profit anything thereby. But this man of love didn’t see it the way the other Samaritans or Jews saw it. Neither historical grudge nor personal ambition could nullify the spirit of love that flowed from a perception of the bruised man’s personal value as a human being chosen and fashioned by God’s own hand. He was, therefore, willing to spend what he could to care for him. It is a deep conviction of human worth that precedes any true ministry of God. One can’t love or serve God unless one respects and loves his fellowmen. This aesthetic consideration is pivotal for all heavenly acceptable relationships, communication, communion, fellowship, and also for a true worship of God.

3. Careless Calumny. The third caveat is against one who calls his brother a fool. The word “fool” used here (Gk. *moros* meaning a morally unwise person) is a title of slander used to vilify someone. The Bible forbids bringing a false accusation against someone or judging others. The sinfulness of such unbelieving labeling is evident in the ancient and modern characterization of people on the basis of essential differences. For instance, Hindu philosophy says that different humans are made of different qualitative elements which are basically three Sattva (light and noble), Rajas (red and passionate), and Tamas (dark and evil).

Similarly, astrology and the so called sciences try to attribute to humans characteristics based on time of birth, physical structure, etc. It is considered by many that people are born with essentially different natures which are unalterable. For instance, people are born as thieves, villains, ruffians, or as nobles, heroes, and good men. The Bible, however, tells us that God made man upright but they have sought out many plans and inventions (Eccl. 7:29). In other words, men become wicked and evil not because of the natures with which they are born but because of a willful commitment to the path of evil action. The Bible also tells us that God fashioned men's hearts alike and clearly perceives all their works (Ps. 33:15). Obviously, it is the uniformity of man's moral condition that makes moral judgment possible. If men were essentially born with particular natures then there could not be a single law equally imposed for all. This was discerned aptly by the Hindus who delineated different laws for different castes of men. However, the Bible sees all as equally answerable to the righteous Law of God. Therefore, any belief-system that endorses the valuing or discrediting of anyone based on a theory of essential dispositional differences is unbiblical. Of course, such belief-systems lie at the background of most aesthetic evaluations and are not always manifest on the screen.

Racialism, casteism, and communalism should not even be named among Christians. Racial arguments are invalid before God because racialism is by itself and in itself false. God created all people groups from one man Adam (Acts 17:26). Of course, this doesn't mean that the tradition and faith of a particular culture has no effect on its members. Yet, all such influence is not necessarily imposed by the culture. It is only voluntarily agreed with. That is one reason why reformers have been found in most of the world cultures. Christians must let go their former way of thinking or the hold of heathenish ideas over their view of mankind. The Egyptians looked down at the Israelites with contempt since they considered nomads and shepherds as ignoble. But God looked on

the Israelites with favor. We need to possess the divine perspective.

Does this mean that we must look at people as essentially good and not evil? Not at all, for good and evil are not essential characteristics of men; they are relational characteristics. It is only God who is essentially good and goodness has its source and finality in Him. Since all beings are contingent on God, therefore, good or evil can only be predicated of men with reference to their conformity or opposition to the nature and disposition of God, which is indicated in the fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 as being love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Scripture says that against such there is no law (Gal. 5:23); therefore, walking in the Spirit also means to crucify the flesh with its passion, to not become conceited (arrogant, snobbish, and puffed up), to not provoke or irritate one another, nor envy anyone. All slander, false accusation, contempt for others, envy, and hatred must be replaced with the fruit of the Spirit. If this is not done, one falls into false pride and false practices.

Thus, it is only by connection to God's truth that one finds true beauty and dignity. If "beauty is truth, truth beauty," as Keats said² or as the Hindu mystics announced saying "*satyam shivam sundaram*", then true aesthetic understanding is only obtained by looking through the eyes of divine truth. Obviously, a self-centered man cannot see true beauty for he is blinded by his own lust and self-conceit and, like a black hole, twists even the light for its own selfish purposes. This is why men lacking spiritual wisdom are experts in Scripture-twisting (2Pt. 3:16). A self-centered heart is a dark and a cold pit that knows nothing of God's truth and His love. Its emotion is lawless, its values abominable, and its behavior

² John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" from *Fifteen Poets* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 359.

demonic (showing pride, ego-centricity, and rebellion). But a heart that is filled with God's love and His Spirit is blessed by God.

© Domenic Marbaniang, Nov 30, 2008